

Rules of the Game

Reading Spell Descriptions (Part Four)

By Skip Williams



It's tough to use a spell when you don't know how long it takes to cast or how far away you can aim the spell. This week, we'll consider casting times and ranges for spells.

Casting Time

The fifth entry in a spell header shows the spell's casting time, as follows:

- 1 standard action: This is the most common casting time and it means exactly what it says. You use a standard action (specifically the cast a spell action) to cast the spell. The spell takes effect during your turn, when you complete the action.
- 1 round: Spells with casting times this long aren't completed in the same round they're cast. You must use a full-round action to cast the spell, but the spell does not take effect until just before your turn on the following round. Remember that this is not the same as casting a spell as a full-round action (as bards and sorcerers must do when casting spells altered with metamagic). Casting a full-round action spell works the same way as any full-round action -- you cast the spell and it takes effect during your turn in the current turn. A 1-round spell takes longer, as explained above,
- 2 rounds or more: These spells work pretty much like spells with 1-round casting times, except that you use a full-round action during each round of the casting time. The spell takes effect just before your turn on the round following the last full-round action you used to cast the spell.
- 1 free action: A fairly rare casting time. When you cast a spell with a casting time this short, you still can use a standard or full-round action during your turn to cast another spell,. You cannot, however, cast another spell with a casting time of 1 free action. Casting a spell as a free action doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity. Normally, you can use a free action only during your own turn, but some spells with casting times of 1 free action can be cast anytime (*feather fall*, for example). In this case, casting the spell during someone else's turn doesn't count as the one spell you can cast as a free action during your next turn.

Range

The next entry in a spell header is the range, which is literally the maximum possible distance there can be between you and any recipient of the spell. You won't have too many opportunities to cast spells at their maximum possible ranges, but if you should do so, an odd thing might occur. None of the spell's effects can extend beyond the spell's range. For example, if you aim a *fireball*, which normally fills a 20-foot radius, so that its point of origin lies exactly at the spell's maximum range, you'll lose about half the spell's usual effect, because the blast cannot spread beyond the spell's maximum range.

This rule might seem a little weird, but it has the virtue of making it very easy to decide if any particular recipient

can be affected by your spell -- if the distance between you and the recipient is greater than the spell's range, the spell simply cannot reach that recipient.

When Range Doesn't Apply: When a spell takes effect on a creature or object, the spell keeps working on that creature or object even if it later moves out of range. This is an important exception to the general rule that a spell's effects can't extend beyond its range. Some spells, however, only affect things so long as they remain in the area the spell covers (see Part Six).

Range Categories: Spell ranges fall into several basic categories, which are largely self-explanatory. Things can get a little tricky when you consider the spell's target, effect, or area (see the next section), so here's a brief overview:

- Personal: The spell affects only you (though you might be able to share the spell with a familiar, animal companion, or other creature with the share spells ability).
- Touch: The spell takes effect on something you touch. To deliver the spell, you must touch the recipient yourself. You can touch things only within your natural reach, though you often can move around for quite awhile before trying to touch anything.
- Close: The spell can reach 25 feet, plus an extra 5 feet per two caster levels. These spells are useful for tactical combat at fairly short distances, such as most dungeon combats.
- Medium: The spell can reach 100 feet, plus an extra 10 feet per caster level. These spells are useful for combat at fairly long distances, such as most wilderness combats.
- Long: The spell can reach 400 feet, plus an extra 40 feet per caster level. These spells are useful for combat at extreme distances.
- Unlimited: The spell can reach anywhere on the plane where you cast the spell. Often, spells with this range don't require line of sight or line of effect to the place where you aim them.
- Ranges in Feet: A few spells have ranges listed in feet rather than a standard range category.

What's Next?

Next week, we'll examine the ins and outs of aiming a spell.

About the Author

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